PharmaCare Newsletter

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eHealth and PharmaNet
Building Towards Electronic Health Records for B.C. Residents

PharmaNet, the province-wide computer network linking pharmacies and other health care sites to a central Ministry of Health database, provides prescription claim processing and clinical drug information to authorized health care providers across the province. This valuable tool, used by B.C. community pharmacists every day and recognized worldwide for its capabilities, will soon be significantly upgraded as part of the B.C. eHealth initiative.

What is eHealth?

The provincial government's eHealth Strategic Framework sets out a group of initiatives and investments that will integrate electronic patient records and connect pharmacists, doctors, and other health care providers to new secure, shared, Electronic Health Records (EHRs). This will include upgrading the existing PharmaNet system to include more comprehensive patient medication profiles. The new eHealth program is supported by significant investments from Canada Health Infoway (Infoway) which assists provincial projects that further the goal of creating EHRs for 50 per cent of Canadians by the end of 2009. B.C. has one of the most comprehensive suites of eHealth projects underway. These projects are cooperatively funded and the approach and architecture conform to the Infoway blueprint for pan-Canadian EHR systems and standards.

How will eDrug affect PharmaNet?

Significant enhancements to PharmaNet will play a key role in the eHealth initiative. The eDrug project, part of the eHealth initiative, will augment PharmaNet's capabilities, allowing it to more fully support the work of pharmacists and physicians in a variety of clinical settings.

Improvements to PharmaNet will be designed to improve patient safety, enhance decision-making, improve coordination and delivery of care, and promote better cost management. For instance, prescribers will be able to enter prescriptions directly into PharmaNet and pharmacies will be able to retrieve the e-prescriptions for dispensing. As well, the recording of prescription pickup by the patient will yield more accurate medication profiles and allow more proactive monitoring of compliance. The profiles will also be updated when a patient is discharged from hospital, with a summary of relevant medications and any updates to clinical conditions. The eDrug project will also make it possible for individuals to access their own PharmaNet medication records online.

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The use of PharmaNet is not intended as a substitute for professional judgment. Information on PharmaNet is not exhaustive and cannot be relied upon as complete. The absence of a warning about a drug or drug combination is not an indication that the drug or drug combination is safe, appropriate or effective in any given patient. Health care professionals should confirm information obtained from PharmaNet, and ensure no additional relevant information exists, before making patient care decisions.

Will the privacy of B.C. residents continue to be protected?

Yes. As noted in the eHealth Strategic Framework, every eHealth project will place the utmost importance on the protection of personal health information and will comply with provincial government requirements. eDrug will build on PharmaNet's leadership in privacy protection and accountability to the public.

In addition, to ensure system security and protect against unlawful access or malicious tampering, safeguards will be built into the system to ensure access is absolutely restricted to only those having a clear right and need to access personal health information or to access the systems within which personal information resides. The transmission of information will be fully safeguarded from accidental or intentional interception and unauthorized users.

Who is involved in the eDrug project?

The College of Pharmacists of B.C., the College of Physicians and Surgeons of B.C., the BC Pharmacy Association and the B.C. Medical Association are key stakeholders and are working with the Ministry of Health and the Pharmaceutical Services Division on the eDrug project. Each actively participates in the eDrug Steering Committee and eDrug Clinical Working Group, providing direction, insight and guidance on the development and implementation of the enhanced system.

What activities are currently underway?

The eDrug project recently received funding approval from Infoway for integration and implementation of the new system. In the months to come, eDrug project representatives and the Ministry of Health's Pharmaceutical Services Division will be working with pharmacists, physicians, and other stakeholders to identify potential enhancements and refine specific system requirements.

Throughout the fall and winter, task groups will meet to review specific issues identified by the eDrug Clinical Working Group. For example:

- The Health Authority Task Group has been initiated to advise and recommend the hospital system medication information that should be integrated with PharmaNet.
- The Drug Information Reference Task Group will review and make recommendations on business requirements for the drug information database that will support eDrug implementation in BC. It will also identify potential Drug Information Reference vendors.
- The Compliance Task Group will contribute to and review compliance specifications and processes for 'point-of-service' software vendors (e.g., vendors who supply software for community pharmacies, physician Electronic Medical Records, etc.).

In the next few weeks, the Ministry of Health eDrug project will be getting the word out about the expansion of PharmaNet:

- On **Wednesday, November 22nd**, in Toronto, Ontario, an information session for software organizations that supply or support pharmacy software is being hosted by Infoway with B.C. and four other participating provinces. For more information, send an e-mail to edrug@gov.bc.ca.
- On **Saturday, November 25th**, in Burnaby, an eDrug presentation at the joint Annual General Meeting of the BC Pharmacy Association and College of Pharmacists of B.C. will give pharmacists an opportunity to learn more about the project. For more information visit the College website (www.bcpharmacists.org/resources/councilcommittees/agm) or the Pharmacy Association website (www.bcpharmacy.ca).
- On **Monday, November 27th**, in Vancouver, an information session will be held for the software organizations that supply or support the software used by community pharmacies, hospitals and physicians offices. For more information, send an e-mail to edrug@gov.bc.ca.

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When will the new PharmaNet system be deployed?

It is expected that the new PharmaNet system will be phased in beginning in early 2008. Community pharmacies will be the first group to connect to the new system.

Where can I get more information on eHealth and eDrug?

For more information, or to view or download a copy of the eHealth Strategic Framework, visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/ehealth/index.html.

Additional information about the plans and activities for PharmaNet expansion can be obtained by contacting edrug@gov.bc.ca.

Updates will be issued as the project progresses.